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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUAYAQUIL 001323

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: BUCARAM BROTHER DENIES ANY DEAL ON RETURN

REF: GUAYAQUIL 00489

1. (SBU) Summary: On November 16, former Presidential candidate Jacobo Bucaram shared his views with Guayaquil CG on the situation within the Roldosista Party (PRE) headed by his brother, ex-President Abdala Bucaram. Jacobo offered no predictions about the return of his exiled brother from Panama and claimed no deals have been made with President Gutierrez to make this happen. He denied any connection between the PRE's support for the President in his fight against impeachment, and Abdala's possible return. As usual, Jacobo denied any further personal political ambitions and was most animated when discussing agricultural issues, expressing concern about the effect of an FTA with the U.S. on Ecuadorian farmers. End Summary.

Don't Look at Me

2. (SBU) As is his wont, Jacobo made it perfectly clear once again that he is not a party insider and has no real interest in politics. Explaining his own relatively impressive political history, he said there were certain things he had to do out of obligation to his younger brother, Abdala. He expressed a much stronger personal preference for his position as rector of the Agricultural University and as a private agriculturalist.

No Deal on Return

3. (SBU) Jacobo said his brother Abdala would return when he was ready to face the legal situation confronting him in Ecuador and suggested that this President could not offer sufficient insulation from possible prosecution on pending corruption charges.

PRE Down After Local Elections

4. Bucaram acknowledged the PRE had lost considerable ground in the October 17 sectional elections (reftel), expressing neither surprise nor offering excuses. Without Abdala, the party had no real leadership, he said. When CG pointed out that PRE candidate for mayor of Guayaquil, Jimmy Jairala, had received nearly 30 percent of the vote running against popular PSC incumbent mayor Jaime Nebot, Bucaram replied that was because he was Jimmy Jairala, TV personality, and not because he was representing the PRE.

2006 Presidential Contenders Don't Include Bucaram

5. (SBU) He stated that Alvaro Noboa (PRIAN) was clearly the front runner for the 2006 presidential elections, helped by his second place finish in 2002, large sums of cash and an organization that is already working to accomplish this. He said former vice president Leon Roldos would probably run again but he gave him no chance of winning. Bucaram claimed that previous PSC candidate for President, Xavier Neira, would be a strong candidate, saying that among the contenders last time Jacobo found him to be the most intelligent and capable. Bucaram also did not rule out another run for the presidency by PSC Chief Leon Febres-Cordero (LFC) who he said would also be a strong candidate. LFC has "so much power in so many places" that he could conceivably win the presidency again. Jacobo said he had no interest in running and did not offer a name for a PRE candidate other than Abdala, should he return.

Worried About FTA Ag Impact

6. (SBU) Jacobo also commented on the recently completed fifth round of the Free trade negotiations in Guayaquil. Although he believes that a free trade agreement will and should be passed, he also expressed his strong concern about the potential damage this will bring to the small scale milk and cattle producers of Ecuador. He claimed that some three million people would be negatively affected by damage to those sectors. He did not dwell on the issue of U.S. agricultural subsidies, simply stating that small Ecuadorian producers were not competitive and were not likely to become

so in the short term.

Comment

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17. (SBU) Jacobo's apparent lack of personal passion for Abdala's return stands in stark contrast to the party's official devotion to such an event. He strikes us as realistic about the prospects of any deal that might bring Abdala back to Ecuador, where he faces open legal charges, and gave the impression that his brother was not the kind of person to place himself at risk. He gave no indication that any deal has been made with the President or his supporters nor does he give the impression that if one were to be negotiated he would be a player in the process. Bucaram's favorable mention of Neira, was surprising to us. Most Guayaquil observers that we have spoken to do not share such a positive view.

18. (SBU) Jacobo Bucaram bears the name but doesn't carry the flame of Abdala. Although he agreed to run for President in 2002, he convincingly claims no real interest in politics; and his public and private actions support that position. Jacobo does not act as a spokesperson for the PRE or seek out the press. In conversation he only warmed noticeably when discussing immediate family, agriculture and his 200-plus hectare farm where he experiments with various crops and raises livestock.

HERBERT